

## CLAIMS:

1. A method for auctioning a lot, comprising:
  - receiving a plurality of messages from a plurality of bidders for the lot, each message including a bid for the lot;
  - sending a bid acceptance messages by SMS to each of said bidders notifying the bidder of the status of their bid;
  - charging each bidder for sending the bid acceptance message; and
  - determining a bidder associated with the lowest unique bid for the lot.
- 10 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of messages are received via SMS messaging.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein charging each bidder includes sending the bid acceptance message by a reverse billed SMS message.
- 15 4. The method of any preceding claim, and further comprising limiting each bidder up to a maximum number of bids per auction.
- 20 5. The method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the bid acceptance message notifies the bidder that either their bid is the current lowest unique bid, their bid is not unique or their bid is unique, but is not currently the lowest unique bid.
6. The method as claimed in any preceding claim and further including:
  - 25 sending a notification message to a bidder when the status of the bidder's bid changes.
7. The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the status of the bidder's bid changes to not currently being a unique bid and the notification message notifies the bidder that 30 their bid is no longer unique and the price of the bidder's bid.
8. The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the status of the bidder's bid changes

to not currently being the lowest unique bid and the notification message notifies the bidder that their bid is no longer the lowest unique bid but is currently a unique bid.

9. The method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the received bidder  
5 messages are passed at least partially over the internet before processing the bid and/or the bid acceptance messages are passed at least partially over the internet before being sent by SMS.

10. The method as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the communication with  
10 the bidders is handled by software in real time.

11. A computer implemented method for facilitating bidder participation in an auction, comprising:

receiving a bid data item over a computer network, the bid data item being  
15 derived from a bid message sent by a bidder;  
determining whether the bid data item is the current lowest unique bid for an auction;  
if it is determined that the bid data item is the current lowest unique bid, then  
marshalling a bid acceptance message indicating that the bid is the current lowest unique  
20 bid, and if it is determined that the bid data item is not the current lowest unique bid, then  
marshalling a bid acceptance message indicating that the bid is not the current lowest  
unique bid;  
determining a destination telecommunications device phone number for the  
acceptance message; and  
25 sending the acceptance message, at least partially over the computer network, for  
transmission to the bidder at the destination telecommunications device by a reverse billed  
SMS message.

12. The method as claimed in claim 11 and further comprising:  
30 receiving an auction identifier data item with the bid data item, the auction  
identifier data item being derived from the same bid message sent by a bidder as the bid  
data item; and

using the auction identifier data item to determine an auction corresponding to the auction identifier data item.

13. The method as claimed in claim 11 or 12 and further comprising:
  - 5 validating the bid data item to determine whether the bid is an acceptable bid for the auction.
14. The method as claimed in any of claims 11 to 13 and further comprising:
  - 10 polling a message store to identify new messages;
  - using a mobile phone telephone number data item to determine whether the bid is associated with a live session for an auction and if it is then loading message data into a message object;
  - 15 if the bid is not associated with a live session for the auction, then using an auction identifier data item to determine whether the bid is for an auction and if it is then loading message data into a message object; and
  - passing the message object to an auction application.
15. The method of any of claims 11 to 14, and further comprising:
  - 20 checking whether the bid data item is in the correct bid units;
  - and if not, then converting the bid data item into the correct bid units.
16. The method of any of claims 11 to 15 and further comprising generating a unique identifier for each bid data item received.
- 25 17. The method of claim 13, wherein validating the bid data item includes at least one operation selected from: determining whether an auction is active; determining whether the bid exceeds a maximum number of bids for the bidder; and determining whether the bid data item falls within a range of acceptable bid values.
- 30 18. The method of any of claims 11 to 17, wherein determining whether the bid data item is the current lowest unique bid for the auction further comprises:
  - carrying out a look up of a database of stored bid data items for the auction;

determining whether the number of stored bids at the bid data item value is zero; if the number of stored bids at the bid data item value is zero then carrying out a look up of the database of stored bid data items for the auction to determine the current lowest unique bid value; and

5 determining whether the bid data item value is less than the current lowest unique bid value.

19. The method as claimed in any of claim 11 to 18, wherein marshalling the bid acceptance message includes:

10 selecting a message template for the acceptance message; looking up stored variable data items; and populating the message template with the variable data items.

20. The method as claimed in claim in any of claims 11 to 19, wherein sending the 15 acceptance message includes loading a message object with message data and bidder data.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein sending the acceptance message further includes placing the message object in a message queue table.

20 22. The method of claim 21, wherein sending the acceptance message further includes:

polling the message queue table to identify new messages; passing new messages to an aggregator service for transmission as an SMS message to the bidder.

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23. The method of claim 22, and further including receiving a receipt ID from the aggregator for the message passed to the aggregator and storing the receipt ID when received.

30 24. The method as claimed in claim 23, and further comprising determining whether the receipt ID has been received and updating a status associated with the sent message.

25. The method as claimed in claim 24, and further comprising:  
identifying a group of lowest unique bids; and  
determining the lowest bid for the group of lowest unique bids for which the bid acceptance message has been received.

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26. A computer system for facilitating bidder participation in an auction, comprising:  
at least a first data processing device and a memory in communication with the data processing device, the memory storing instructions for configuring the processor to:

10 receive a bid data item over a computer network to which the computer system is connected, the bid data item being derived from a bid message sent by a bidder;

determine whether the bid data item is the current lowest unique bid for an auction;

if it is determined that the bid data item is the current lowest unique bid, then to generate a bid acceptance message indicating that the bid is the current lowest unique bid,

15 and if it is determined that the bid data item is not the current lowest unique bid, then to generate a bid acceptance message indicating that the bid is not the current lowest unique bid;

determine a destination telecommunications device phone number for the acceptance message; and

20 send the acceptance message, at least partially over the computer network, for transmission to the bidder at the destination telecommunications device by a reverse billed SMS message.

27. Computer program code executable by a data processing device to provide the

25 method of any of claims 11 to 15 or the computer system of claim 26.

28. A computer program product comprising a computer readable medium storing the computer program code of claim 27.